

Fading

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Summary: They never spoke. Not once. She knew what that meant. She pretended it was indifference - but she always knew what that meant. They were both just as desperate as each other. M for Mature Content.

Fading

\*\*\_I should start by apologising profusely for any inaccuracies particularly \_\*\*\*\*\_regarding Starkiller Base. That aside, I hope you will\_\_ enjo\_\_y the read!\_\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>I cannot breathe. I have focused so acutely on the task at hand that I now find myself unable to continue to do so without difficulty. I take a deep breath in and feel as though I am choking myself. I take a breath out and feel my stomach churn. My throat has closed in on itself, my palms have begun to sweat, my feet are threatening to trip over themselves as I walk. I know I am being ridiculous - not in my reasoning, by any means, but in my behaviour towards my current mission. I am a soldier. I have faced danger before, though perhaps none so unpredictable as this. I am well practised at maintaining my composure in stressful situations - and this is no different to any other.<p>

General Hux's boots thump down the corridor alongside mine. If he is having any anxiety at present (though I consider that to be doubtful, given his many dealings with Ren), he does not show it outwardly. I hope I am not being too obvious, but even as I think that I feel my face heats in embarrassment. Grandfather would be furious. Father would have had me thrashed if he knew I was behaving in such a way. I am grateful, and not for the first time, that both are long dead.

The corridors on base are never-ending. Endless metal panels continue until a corner is reached, and turned to find an identical silver

corridor, though this one feels narrower than the last, and narrower still as we walk along it. I wonder if that is my imagination, but it would not surprise me to discover otherwise: it is just the sort of subterfuge people like Hux delight in.

We seem to walk for an age, but finally we halt outside a door as tall as the wall itself. Hux had been sure that he would find Ren inside, and the presence of two troopers at the entrance confirms it. They are not for Ren's protection. They are a warning to whichever poor soul might have been considering visiting the external observation deck this morning. Guarding the room during one of Ren's meditations was considered to be one of the preferred jobs of the troopers, in that it was the only post by which you could be absolutely sure of where Ren one as at any moment in time, and therefore certain that he was not about to appear out of nowhere. I understand that fear. All of us on base who has ever caught a glimpse of Ren or heard stories of his capabilities understands that fear.

I press my lips firmly together and hold my breath as one of the guards enters the code to have the door opened. My anxiety is only made worse by the fact that I have no idea what I am doing here. I should not have come. This is an unusual occurrence. Hux is my immediate superior officer, and I have always reported to him, but today he insisted I accompany him to report to Ren.

My team's find has been so great, he had said. Recognition is deserved, he had said. I don't want recognition. Not from Ren, not from anyone at all. My mission, like everyone's on base, is to find and destroy the rebellion - the continuance of our efforts is all I need. I want to run back down the corridor and hide, and I can think of no way to suppress this cowardice. I can only hope that Ren does not sense it, but such a hope is a fleeting one at best.

I hold my hands clasped tightly together behind my back as we wait. I have bitten my nails down as far as I can, so much so that my fingers throb, and I have no desire to be reprimanded for the unsightly state of my hands.

The great doors open. I feel a rush of heat to my face as I see him, closer than I have ever seen before. He has his back to us, watching out over the vast space before him, at stars and moons and planets that lie in the distance. He does not turn. I feel my eyes burn as I stare at him and turn away to the Stormtrooper to my right. His head is turned straight ahead but I have no idea where he is looking. I wonder if he is pitying me. I wonder if he has noticed that something is amiss. I wonder if there is even anyone inside those faceless cases; they are so expressionless, so statuesque in their stances, that I can hardly believe that there is.

Hux walks forward into the room and I follow dutifully beside him, flinching as the doors are sealed tightly behind us. Hux stops. I stop. He speaks. I have an overwhelming urge to be sick. Hux explains the situation. The message from the Rebels. Our interception. My decoding. Lor San Tekka. The map. No location yet confirmed. Ren has finally turned and is coming nearer. I cannot look at him. I see no point in it; I can see nothing beyond the mask, and to look would only be to intensify my fear. I watch the floor instead. He doesn't have to come far, such is his height, before his shadow has engulfed my feet. I see the outline of his helmet. I imagine the mask, that which carefully conceals the deformity that is his face. Rumours of

his disfigurements pass around base in their abundance. The uniform is simply misdirection; it offers the appearance of a man, tall, strong, imposing, but beneath it he is grotesque and mutilated, warped and scarred, various pieces missing and replaced with poor, mechanical replicas. Barely humanoid at all.

Ren speaks, a confident, powerful voice produced by his helmet. I grit my teeth through it, calming myself in the imagining of his true voice, small, weak, easily forgotten - and suddenly he stops speaking. He pauses, a hesitation which lasts a lifetime. He has heard me. He has sensed my thoughts and now, I am convinced, he will kill me. The nape of my neck has begun to sweat. My shirt sticks to my back uncomfortably. My shoes become a blur as my eyes begin to water. Painful seconds pass - and then, all of a sudden, Ren is speaking again. I sense no difference in his tone. He remains as neutral and unimpressed as always, despite the fact that he is congratulating Hux on the discovery.

The conclusion is met. Lor San Tekka must be discovered immediately. Our division will double our efforts. Triple them. All of this is expressed without the slightest acknowledgment of my presence by Ren - for this I consider myself grateful beyond words. We are dismissed.

Hux leaves me at the end of the corridor. I nod at him as acknowledgement of his departure. He does not acknowledge me. I am glad. Less chance of stalling, more chance of a swift escape. I watch the general leave, steeling myself in order to catch my breath a little. At least the corridor is empty. I won't be stopped. I can move on as I please. Officers in my team often pass me in corridors and attempt to engage in idle chitchat with their superior. I have no interest in them, but just as they have hopes to rise in their stations, as have I - and if I am to one day become Captain, I am going to need excellent references.

I have even less interest in conversation today. I keep my eyes down. Walking quickly, no running, trying not to trip over my own feet. I slip into the toilets. I try to do so as casually as possible. The cameras will see me. They see everything, watching every move. Questions will be asked. I will be sent for psychoanalysis. I cannot have that. Captains do not need to be sent for psychoanalysis.

The bathroom is blissfully cold. I lock myself inside the nearest cubicle and press my warm face onto its cool, metal side. I am a disgrace. To myself, to my division, to my family. I allowed him to disturb me. I was frightened. I am frightened. So why can I not stop thinking about it? Why can I not stop thinking about him? My initial disgust aside, I am left with a morbid curiosity to know what is beneath that mask. To know what I am so desperately afraid of. To know what has caused me to so badly lose my composure.

I take deep breaths. In, out, in, out, in, out. This is perfectly normal, I tell myself. Of course it is. Kylo Ren is no usual man, and so it stands to reason that I should be afraid of him, even to this extent. It is only because I have nothing to compare it to that my response is unsettling me so much. Hux's composure in the presence of Ren could well be nothing but a facade: perhaps years of dealings with Ren has left the general as capable of concealing his true reaction as Ren's mask is of concealing his.

Fear is a perfectly natural response. Even my grandfather, a Captain himself some thirty years ago, never met Vader or found himself within more than ten feet of the man, and yet he was obviously deeply unnerved by the man. Surely the only concern that remains is \_why me\_? Why was I forced to endure that? Was there any point at all of me being there when I never even received the slightest acknowledgement of my presence from Ren? I can only assume, with a great deal of hope, that this morning was a test. I have been a lieutenant for two years now, and Hux will naturally be aware of my desire for a promotion - this then, \_surely\_, must have been a test. After all, should I continue to do well in my field, I may one day have to report directly to Ren myself. I should be grateful for the chance of practise.

The bathroom door bangs open, and I stand to attention - an automatic response that is ridiculous considering I am still locked inside an enclosed cubicle. I flush the toilet. I may have been locked inside, but that would not stop someone asking questions if I stay in here. An officer is washing her hands in the sink. I hear her sobbing from inside my cubicle, short, wet, shaky sniffles. She does her best to hide her face from me when I appear, but I can see her blotchy eyes in the mirror.

She does her best to take steadying breaths as I am washing my hands. I smile politely when she catches my eye, if awkwardly, and she returns the same brief gesture. I wash my hands in silence, as quickly as I possibly can. She takes one last deep breath and smooths down her bright blonde hair. She draws a tube of lipstick from some secret concealment within her jacket and applies a coat. I watch her, fascinated, until I realise I am staring and turn away quickly, busying myself with drying my hands with a paper towel. I have never seen someone apply lipstick before. It is beautiful, smooth, blood red, perfect. But when I turn back, she is gone.

But she has left me a message. Written on the mirror in red lipstick is one, single word: \_Help\_.

My eyes widen in panic. I feel my heart race. I throw myself at the mirror, the same, damp towel I had used to dry my hands now smearing the lipstick across the glass in a daft attempt to clear it away. I dunk the towel under the tap, successfully soaking the front of my trousers in the process, and wipe the already soiled cloth in a circular motion until all that remains is a large, red smudge.

I drop the towel into the sink, wiping my hands down my trouser legs. The mirror is far from clean, but there is no evidence of what it once had said. She is gone, and so is her message.

I leave the bathroom feeling a great deal more sensible than when I entered. I have been ridiculous, but there is nothing I can do about it now. My embarrassment will not change what has passed, but perhaps will assist me in behaving in a suitable manner next time around. It is over and done, and I have an important task to be getting on with instead of hiding in toilet cubicles like a child.

I am ready to begin my new mission. My mind is completely focused on finding Lor San Tekka, on destroying the rebel scum as quickly and efficiently as is possible. There is a great deal of work to be done. I know that. I am determined to think of nothing but that. I am determined not to succumb to any distractions - and this works, at

least for the thirty seconds that come between my deciding it and my turning the corner and catching sight of the one thing that would surely break my attention - him. I don't think about it. There he is, a tall, black figure, and my eyes involuntarily follow him - and then my feet. An impulsive urge propels me forwards.

He is heading down corridor B-23. I scramble desperately to remember where that leads. He is likely making his way to the mapping room, but I will follow him as far as the medical bay. An officer on my team, Brandon, had half his leg amputated some weeks ago after an incredibly foolish accident involving an incompetent (and now permanently dismissed) Stormtrooper. I had no interest in visiting him until today.

I am amazed by how quickly that excuse comes to me. I tell myself it is nothing but curiosity, that here is a novelty like no other. Wouldn't anyone in my position be as interested as I am? I don't know what I will achieve from following him, but I am convinced that it is a good idea. Perhaps I will see something in the way he walks to convince me once and for all that he has no legs beneath those trousers, no arms beneath those sleeves, no skull beneath that helmet; that instead of flesh and muscle, bone and sinew, he is nothing but metal plates and electric wires, cogs and gears and circuits.

He walks ahead of me. Quick, long, effortless strides. At least thirty feet, three troopers and two uniformed officers separate us. They are all much closer to myself than him, keeping a considerable distance from him at all times. They are an irritation. I cannot see past them to him. I am trying to remain neutral but I am becoming more and more frustrated by the minute. I want to see him. I need to see him.

I catch a glimpse of a hand. Like everything else, it is concealed by black leather. I imagine the truth beneath it, the gnarled fingers, the discoloured skin. Everything disfigured, just as the rumours say. But then I imagine otherwise. I picture a strong hand, five digits, no imperfections, capable of anything. I wonder what colour it is. His other I picture as exactly the same, no irregularities, nothing replaced by metal appendages. I imagine how they would feel to touch. Warm and soft. Pleasurable.

The officers in front stop dead in their tracks. I almost collide into them but stop myself in time. The troopers ahead have done so already. Ren has stopped. He does not turn fully, but he is looking sideways, perhaps even behind. The Stormtroopers shuffle their feet uncomfortably. The officers give each other nervous glances, then look behind at me. I am frozen in panic. Has he heard me? Could he hear me, or would he have had to have been listening purposefully? I don't know how the force works. I can only hold my breath and pray.

Nobody moves. Nobody dares. But then, just as immediately as he had stopped in the first place, Ren starts walking again. He turns down the next available corridor, to the left, and I am thankful to see the entrance to the medical bay on my right.

I cannot sleep. Something is wrong with me. Deeply wrong. I think I have gone mad. I can see no other explanation as to why I cannot stop thinking about Kylo Ren. There is no other explanation. It is beyond

curiosity now. It has stemmed into complete and utter madness.

I lie on my back, staring at the ceiling. I have thrown the covers onto the floor in irritation, sweltering at the time but now only annoyed at how cold I have become without them. The image of Ren's hand, as conjured by my own imagination, returns to me, and I squeeze my eyes shut, pressing my palms flat against them, hoping to expel the idea from my mind - to no avail. The picture is getting clearer - I see a hand, an arm, a torso. His hand against my stomach, a brief and gentle caress, before it travels down between my legs.

A knock on the door startles me. I sit upright immediately, hastening to turn on the bedside lamp, then scramble from the bed and to the door, tripping over the discarded bedcovers in the process. I regain my footing quickly, kicking them out of the way. I have never had a visitor in the night before; whatever it is, it must be important.

I could not have prepared myself for the reality. I had never considered myself to be mad before this night, but I wonder if this is the final proof I need. He walks straight past me and into my room. I am half-convinced that he is nothing but a figment of my imagination, but that does not stop me from being so terrified. I cannot look at him. I cannot even move. The door shuts of its own accord, and I know that is his doing. I hear a strange noise behind me. I don't have to turn to know that he has taken off his mask.

I don't want to see. Has he come here to torture me? Has he come to horrify me with visions of his true, gruesome self before he finally kills me? I want to run, but I know I would never get through the door unless he wanted me to. I consider potential weapons, but I know that to fight would be a useless waste of energy. I am trapped, with no hope of escape. I take a breath. I am shaking uncontrollably as I turn around.

He holds his helmet down by his side. I see it first. I drag my eyes upwards - and what I find confuses me. A face, terrifyingly normal, looks back at me. I don't understand. There is no malice in it, no evil, no hatred. He is human, not far from my age, and there is nothing monstrous about him. He could be anyone at all. A trooper, an officer, a civilian - anyone. His face is unremarkable; a pale face with thick, black eyebrows and full lips, framed with long, black hair.

He watches me carefully. I remain silent. I have no idea what is happening, nor the meaning of this intrusion. I see him swallow hard. This isn't right. He isn't right. He is unsure. He is waiting for something - my reaction, perhaps - but then he gives up waiting. He sets his helmet down on the dressing table beside him and begins removing his gloves, making a point to hold up both hands for my inspection. They are perfectly normal, just as I had imagined.

Now I fully understand.

Neither of us speak. Words are not necessary, and they may only serve to change our minds. I know what he has come for, and I have no objections to giving it to him. I am not afraid of that. I am no longer afraid of him. The mask is gone. There are many things I ought to be afraid of now, but he is not one of them. He kisses me, finally. I am surprised by how gentle his lips are. I reach up and pull him closer, tentatively, encouraging him. Take me. Use me. I

will not break.

His arms enclose me, holding me near, keeping me captured. He lifts me up, enough to carry me to the bed and press me down upon it. I wait patiently as he quickly undresses, removing my pyjamas. There is something so oddly mechanical about this. There is passion, without a doubt - I feel a desperate desire to feel his touch, to have him inside of me - and yet, it does not feel as I think it should. There is no romance about it. There is no kindness in the ravenous way he looks at my body. There is nothing but hunger between us. We are not lovers. We are nothing more than animals giving in to nature.

I feel as though I should be ashamed, that some part of me ought to regret my actions. I do not. I feel no urge to hide myself from him - after all, he is here before me, as naked as I am. I know that what I am doing is wrong, as I am sure he does too, but it has already begun. It cannot be taken back now. There will be consequences, but they are not to be considered until the day arrives when they can no longer be ignored.

Ren stands at the end of the bed, naked, and rests his hands on the rail. I quirk an eyebrow, curious, and suddenly he pulls the bed forward, preventing any potential of it knocking against the wall. He then moves to the side of the bed and climbs on. I lie back, legs slightly apart, a subtle welcoming. His hands against my thighs, he gently spreads them further. His lips begin at my right knee. He kisses his way up my thigh. I am breathless. I have never experienced this before, never known pleasure aside from my own administrations. It is like nothing I could have imagined. When his tongue finally reaches the cleft between my legs, I let out an involuntary gasp. I have to clasp my hand over my mouth to muffle my moans. His tongue works away expertly, until I am nothing but a squirming mess. I want to cry out. I feel it building and I want to scream. He puts his hands on each of my thighs and opens me up, as wide as possible, his tongue digging deeper, continuing even as I begin to shake.

He lets me go. I collapse, gasping for breath, but he is already wanting more. He hovers over me, seeming hesitant. I don't know what he is waiting for. It is too late now to change our minds. I twist my hands in his hair and pull him down to kiss him urgently. I feel him fumbling between our legs - and then, suddenly, an intrusion. I feel slight pain. He sighs in pleasure just as I hiss in discomfort. He pauses, hips raised, but I force mine upwards to meet his, burying him deeper, urging him to carry on. The pain passes quickly; satisfaction takes its place. I feel a familiar sensation, and I know he is feeling it too. We are both groaning, lips pressed tightly together. I arch my back, panting. I can't stay quiet. His hand clamps over my mouth, stifling my moans.

We stay that way even when it's over, hot and sweating, two slick bodies pressed against each other, disgustingly warm but as yet too weak to care to move. I have to push his hand from my mouth myself. He buries his face in my neck. He stays collapsed on top of me for a while, his body heavy over mine, until finally he detaches himself. We lie side by side in silence.

I must have fallen asleep. I don't remember feeling tired, but suddenly it is morning again. My alarm is ringing, my head pounding, and my bed, aside from myself, empty. I have only one reminder of the night before, but that will be washed away in the shower. I think

back to it, to the uncomfortable heat, to the weight of him on top of me, to the smell and the sounds and the sticky residue, and I wonder what could possibly be so appealing about all this - but then I remember the hunger I felt for him, and I remember, vividly, the pleasure I felt by his command, even though he seems like a distant memory. I know I will do it again, over and over, until finally they come for me.

I shower and dress as usual. My morning routine is thankfully so habitual that I can make it through the first two hours of the day without having to think too strenuously. I spend those two hours daydreaming about him, about the things he would do to me, because I know I cannot for the rest of the day until I am alone again tonight. I imagine the wait, and I am exhausted by the very idea of it.

Three days pass. I don't see Ren in those days, and neither does the rest of the base. It is said that he spent the entire time on the observation deck in solitary meditation. I spent three days convincing myself that in the end, when finally he should emerge, he would do so only to report me to Hux. I had convinced myself of his mind, of his guilt at what we had done, of his loyalty to the cause and how I was a betrayal to exactly that. I focus on my work as best I can, but only half of me is present, the other half waiting by those great, silver doors, begging for them to open and expel him from inside.

I have never been so happy to be wrong.

I am sat at my station. We have intercepted another message from the rebels, this in another code to the last, and for two days now I have attempted to decipher it, along with the six other members of my team. The message is long-winded and nonsensical, as are most, but my brain is not sharp enough to make sense of it. I know Hux is becoming impatient. I should have figured it out by now. Urgency is required. By the time I have the decoded message to present to the general, it could be too late.

Two things distract me. The first is Ren and the threat of our discovery. Every thought I have of him is joined by another of terror at the idea of what they could do to me. There are no written rules preventing our relationship but we both know it to be wrong.

The second is the slip of paper, folded in half, that is waiting for me on my desk that morning. I snatch it up, concealing it from the rest of them. I know my team. We have no blonde officers here, and certainly none with a preference for lipstick. In fact, I know of no officers like her. I don't know where she came from or where she went. I have never seen her before, nor since that first time. I wonder if I will ever see her again; if she continues with such reckless behaviour, I find that idea doubtful.

I sit down, warily casting glances over my shoulder - but I know I will have to open it before Hux arrives. I unfold it slowly, surprised at how frightened I am at what could possibly be inside.

Just two words, written with lipstick: \_Help me\_.

I fold the paper carefully back in half and slip it into my breast pocket, but I cannot shake my nerves. I don't know who she is, but I

know she will not leave me alone. Unless she has no other choice.

The doors to the cipher room slide open. My stomach churns as familiar-sounding boots thud towards me and stop behind my desk. I stand to attention, ever the good soldier. I regret to inform Hux that I have no progress to report. His eyes narrow and the corners of his mouth tighten. He looks me over, scrutinising. He comments on my pallor - I seem unwell or, perhaps, exhausted. He insists I visit the medical bay for inspection. I assure him I am well. He insists.

I feel every eye on me as I leave the room. I do not feel well. I am exhausted. In two days, I have barely eaten. I have amounted a total of six hours sleep, but I know that if I lay my head down now I would not fall asleep. I am electric with nerves, on edge, practically buzzing. In three days I have seen nothing of him, and I am desperate to know my fate. How can I sleep under such uncertainty? How can I do anything except slowly drive myself insane?

I try my best to stay calm on the outside, and I am convinced of my own success. Inside, my mind is melting, but I stand straight, appropriately authoritative; my hair is neat, uniform straight, shoes shined to perfection. I feel as though I am drowning, and yet there is nothing that would suggest that that was the case to the outside world. The distance that I have always placed between myself and my fellow comrades prevents them from prying. The anxiety that I have always displayed, that once compelled me to be a better cipher, that kept me focused on my work, that help me make logical decisions and provided me with the adrenaline I needed to keep going in difficult situation, does not seem out of place now. There is nothing different about me as far as the eye can see. I have perfected my mask, just like Hux, just like Ren.

The medic finds nothing serious to be amiss. She tells me I am exhausted. I agree. Obviously the result of too much hard work and too little rest. Obviously. General Hux has commed her ahead of my arrival to tell her to sign me off for the rest of the day. I have never felt so disgraced. For the first time in my life, I do not think of how this will affect my professional future, but of how my rapidly depreciating behaviour could bring an end to Ren and me quicker than I had ever imagined - if he hadn't planned to end it already.

My room is cold. They don't heat the dormitories during the day. There is work to be done during the day, and time off is unheard of except for in special circumstances - sickness included. I strip anyway, dumping my jacket and pants over a chair. I don't bother locking the door. I sit in the middle of the floor, staring into the vacant space around me. On the floor, by the chair, the slip of paper has fallen out of my jacket pocket. I pick it up, rubbing the smooth paper back and forth between my finger. The paper opens, revealing another sheet inside.

Two messages. I don't know how I could have missed the second, but yet the proof is right before me. I unfold the first piece of paper, the very same I had read earlier that day; the second, however, has only one red word written on it: Please. I screw the papers up into a ball and throw them away, to some unreachable corner of my room.

I sit in my underwear and shirt on the floor with a pile of paper and

pen, scribbling away furiously. I know the rebel message by heart; I have no trouble recalling it, but I can find nothing hidden in it. Without my computer and my team I have no hopes of progression - and yet, not an hour later, I have already copied it out ten times.

Still nothing. I hurl the pen across the room, closely followed by the papers, which make little distance and instead scatter themselves further across the floor. I lie in the middle of them, curled up, face burning, eyes streaming, and eventually I fall asleep.

He is there when I wake, sitting in the exact spot I had fallen asleep in. I assume my moving to the bed was his doing. He looks up from the paper in his hands. He opens his mouth as though to speak but I press a finger to my lips. No talking. It won't make a difference when they come for me, when they inspect my mind and discover my true feelings, but I at least will have this one grasping naivety. So much is given away in words, and I can only hope that our silence will make it so much harder for them. If they cannot hear it said, then it is not there to be spoken of in the first place.

It is all of it ridiculous, but it must be believed. I believe they will not find us. I believe that this - this unfeeling fulfilment of basic, primal urges - is nothing worth discovering. I believe that I can get away with it.

I wonder what he would have said. That we had to stop, perhaps. That he was sorry. That our discovery was inevitable. I don't want to hear any of those things. I already know them all. We can't stop. I'm sorry too, but not nearly as much as you are. They will discover us, but there will be no consequences for you. I coerced you. I bewitched you. I manipulated you. You are an asset, I am a liability. They can do without me. They cannot do without you. But that is a bridge that must be burned when I arrive at it - and only then.

He looks back down to the rebel message. Casual, as though none of this is out of the ordinary. My heart is thumping and my palms sweat. I wonder if I am excited or terrified; I come to the conclusion it is a little of both. My excitement terrifies me.

I run my fingers briefly through his hair as I pass. He stiffens. He is wondering when the last time was that anyone felt comfortable enough to engage in such an intimacy with him. I wonder the same thing of myself, then I realise I don't care.

The water is freezing. It is not my first cold shower but still it takes some time to build up the courage to step into the cubicle. I bite down on my lower lip, steeling myself, even the faint spray I can feel standing two feet away enough to take my breath away. There is no other option than to just throw myself in there and get it over with - but the mirror distracts me.

I didn't see it before. My top had covered it, sprawled across my back, messy handwriting scribbled all over, over and over and over and over. The same words repeated.

\_Help me please. Help me please. Help me please. Help me please. Help  
me please. Help me please. Help me please. Help me please. Help me  
please. Help me please. Help me please. Help me please. Help me  
please. Help me please. Help me please. Help me please. Help me

please. Help me please. Help me please. Help me please. Help me please. —Help me please. Help me please. Help me please. —

I claw at my skin, bending my arms at unnatural angles, fingers slipping over the red, slime-like substance, but I cannot reach it all. I still see those words. I cannot be rid of them. Seared onto my skin in that harsh, angry colour. I need something extra to reach the middle of my back, but the nearest thing to me is my razor. I snatch it up anyway, ready to use it to remove the writing. I am rightfully frantic - but, when I turn back to the mirror, the writing is gone. The lipstick is gone. There is no sign of it, no evidence at all.

I drop the razor. It clatters loudly on the tiled floor. I feel tired all of a sudden. Heavy. Had I fallen asleep? It felt like a dream. It must have been a dream. I am exhausted. A cold shower is exactly what I need to wake me up again, to help me feel a little more normal.

He is still staring at the paper when I return from my shower, wearing nothing but a towel. He pretends not to see me but I can see him watching my legs as I pass. I sit cross-legged on the floor opposite, rubbing a spare towel through my wet hair. But this is strange, normal even, both of us sat together like an old, married couple. I don't care that he's trying to think. I don't give a damn about the rebel message. I don't care about my job. I care that he has been here half an hour already and he still has all his clothes on. I care that he isn't inside me yet, that neither of us are moaning in pleasure, that I'm not a sweating, hot mess.

I snatch the paper from his hand, crumple it in my hand and toss it away. He doesn't seem surprised; he knew I was coming. He unfastens the band around his waist; I work on the trousers, managing to unfasten them before he has lifted his robes over his head. My head lowers to his lap. His hands falter, cloth suspended halfway down muscular arms, his lips parting, rendered insensible at the sensations my mouth is granting him.

Kylo Ren came to my room every night that week. I don't know how he evaded them or their cameras for so long. I didn't think about it. I didn't want to. If I had thought about it, I might have realised how ridiculous the idea was. I might have realised how ridiculous I was. I didn't care. I didn't care about anything except him. I withdrew into myself, refusing to participate in conversation with anyone, refusing even to speak with Hux unless to convey the bare minimum - and only when directly instructed to. The rebel message remained a mystery, with every precious day passing, and yet my constant anxiety had nothing to do with that and everything to do with my impatience to be with him again. I chewed my nails down to painful stubs, refused meals, survived on as little sleep as possible. I destroyed myself in the space of one week, and I didn't even realise it. In fact, I don't think I had ever been happier.

We still never spoke. We made eye contact as little as possible. We pretended as though we did not care for each, but afterwards, when the sex was over, when my body was uncomfortably warm and tingled to the touch, he would let me lie beside him. He would put his arm around me and pull me closer, and he would let his fingers absently stroke my hair. I knew what that meant, and so did he.

I often fell asleep that way, his hand in my hair, my face on his chest, nothing between us but a thin sheen of sweat. I had never

known comfort like it, not even as a child. My father was never affectionate, nor Grandfather, and I had never known my mother. I assumed she was dead but I never asked and no one ever told me anything about her. When I started my official training I discovered that it was the same case for many others: a father, a father's father, and so on - but no mothers. Never any mothers.

I close my eyes, my cheek pressed onto Ren's firm chest. The heat is uncomfortable and hair tickles my face but I am too exhausted to move. I think back to two weeks ago, when he first came to me. I remember it vividly, as I remember all our meetings. I remember the shock when his tongue first touched me. The fear when he first entered me, quickly replaced by pleasure. I want to never forget that. I want to never forget him. His fingers in my hair become more and more distant. I drift away, to dream of things even more ridiculous than my unbelievable version of reality.

He is gone.

They wake me as I knew they would. Violently. A bucket of cold water is thrown over me. I think I am drowning. I half hope it, because that would mean that it was almost over, and not just begun. They drag me from my soaked bed and force me into my uniform, my arms and legs bent into unnatural angles, slippery appendages catching on unwelcome, dry fabric, and yet being coerced in anyway at the cost of my skin.

I am marched through corridors which should never be empty and yet somehow are anyway. A spectacle is avoided. I am not to become a warning to all, then. I am to be dealt with quickly and secretly. A minor annoyance to be given as little thought as possible.

I have never seen a room like it, so big and dark and terrifying. Hux is here, but he is not who frightens me, for the creature behind him, as big as the room itself even when sat on a great chair, is like nothing I have ever seen, or shall ever see again. He is inhumane. \_Ugly\_. He is the very grotesque beast I imagined I would see beneath Ren's mask those weeks ago.

I am forced to my knees. I can't hear all of what they are saying. I am drowning and there is water in my ears.

\_This is the one.\_

\_Yes, Supreme Leader.\_

\_...ineffective?\_

\_It would appear that way, Supreme Leader.\_

My head spins. I feel as though \_I'm\_ spinning, round and round and round. Like I'm kneeling on a rotating plate twirling faster and faster and faster. I want to be sick but there is nothing left in my stomach; I didn't eat yesterday. I'm not sure I ate the day before either.

I dig the tips of my fingers into my palms. I imagine my nails were longer and not just stubs. I press the sharp points deeply into my hands and feel the punctures, the warm pooling of blood. My fingertips are covered in red. I trail them over the previously

unmarked areas of my hand, writing his name over and over again.

\_Should we send her away, Supreme Leader?\_

My ears prick up at the sound of Hux's voice. Yes, send me away. Please, send me away. Send me far, far away.

\_She is intelligent, Supreme Leader.\_

\_Evidently not. She cannot be retrained. But we may still have some use for her, General.\_

He is here. He thinks I cannot see him but I know he is hiding in the shadows, as always. He doesn't say anything, neither in my defense or to further condemn me. But I never expected him to.

I cannot bring myself to look at him. I cannot move at all. I'm scared, more than anything, that if I turn now, if I look at him, if I see what he truly looks like, that it will be nothing like what I remember.

I realise now that I had considered Ren appearing in my room that first night to be the test. I had imagined myself to be the subject of that test. I had allowed myself to think that the likes of Hux and Snoke could possibly think of me as anyone worthy of their time and efforts. I am no one, but I was there. Available. To be used at will for any and every purpose. The test was not for me. The test was never me.

And the test had only just begun. I know what silence sounds like when it comes from. I have heard it a thousand times. I am familiar with it, I know it better than I know any other sound - but this is different. This is not the same vacant silence I know. This is deliberation. This is a choice. This is a decision that he and I both know is imperative to his future.

And I know, as I always do, what he will say without him having to speak it. I hear it clearly in my head.

\_She is mad, Supreme Leader. She is of no use to our cause and she cannot be trusted. She has a blatant disregard for the rules. She must be terminated.\_

I have no one here to beg. No one would listen. Asking for help, no matter how fervently, would make no difference. But I always knew that. I squeeze my eyes tightly together but still the tears escape. I wipe them from my cheeks, catching my lips with the back of my hand. I wipe the greasy, red residue onto the trouser leg.

The Supreme Leader agrees. Hux agrees. Ren stays to watch. It doesn't feel like a betrayal. I knew it would end this way. It had to. It hurts, but I always knew that it had to. This was his test, not mine. There was never anything left to salvage, nothing left to even hold on to. I was already broken, slowly fading away.

End  
file.